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Constructions 2012

Introduction:

Interdisciplinarity in the Historiography of Philosophy

Claudiu Mesaros

West University, Blvd. V. Parvan 4, Timișoara, Romania

Abstract

The following is a short presentation of the Workshop that took place in Timișoara, Romania, between the 22nd – 23rd of September 2012. The papers presented at the workshop are published in this special issue.

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Keywords: Historiography of Philosophy; West University of Timișoara, (UEFISCDU) Bucharest, practices in Philosophical Historiography, Traditions, social image of philosophy, Philosophy within local and regional context.

The Workshop “*History of Philosophy: Representations and cultural constructions*” took place at the West University of Timișoara, Romania, between the 22nd – 23rd of September, and has been organized under the Romanian Funding Authority for the Higher Education and Scientific Research (UEFISCDU), Bucharest. I assumed the management of the project on the premise that an innovative exploration was possible within the context given by the significant preoccupations of important philosophers of the last decades for defining an *actualized public image of philosophy*; starting, for example, from the contribution of Rorty, Schneewind and Skinner [1] who proposed the most prominent figures of the 1980’s to take positions and pointed towards methodological changes asking philosophers to introduce themselves as authors of methods for logical reconstruction or clarification, or interpreters of scientific outcomes. The problem to deal with, on these grounds, was the possibility to discuss the Historiography of Philosophy within the frame of an interdisciplinary set of investigation methods, and we especially aimed at Representational and Imagological support, as well as some History of Ideas resources.

We explored the idea that the relation between History of Philosophy and Imagology rests on both external and internal fundaments equally. Internally (on Philosophical grounds) we can trace the very recent contribution of Kenny [2] for whom, more or less, understanding problems of philosophy becomes a ‘medical’ act of treating

confusions that manifest as symptoms particular to times, systems, and individual philosophers. Most specific to our time, he says, is the tendency of philosophers to assume human mind on the computer-based model: adepts of such representation have consequent difficulties in understanding the normativeness of certain human behavior patterns that the cybernetic model does not endorse. Such a model is *alive* and determinative for the way we think ourselves and read texts. There were other times, nevertheless, when philosophers understood human spirit according to different restrictive models like telephone, pedal musical organ, homunculus, free spirit, etc. They are *dead* for good, Kenny [2] considers, but some of the other past models are only *asleep* and may be awakened at any time – for example the theory that stars are living creatures, or that their movements determine human behavior. Even philosophical or metaphysical ideas stood on confusions occasionally, like the case with post-Platonic philosophers' confusion about the different uses of the verb 'to be.' 'Medication' for such symptoms seems to be the historically-aware practice of philosophy or, in Kenny's [2] terms, one being a philosopher-historian and historian-philosopher at the same time.

Externally, we relied on the resources coming from the communication sciences themselves to the limit that there are consistent, internationally visible, attempts to turn the fundamental research of philosophy into public content and events. It was a report on the Liverpool's *Philosophy in the City* festival that initially inspired my endeavour to deal with bringing philosophy into public attention and proposing philosophical research to urban life [3]. The festival organizers, the report says [3], believed that there was a public representation of philosophers connected to most diverse and culturally fertile determinations like the city they were born or active in (Greeks and Medieval scholastics called philosophers by their cities), or – quite often – to places they took refuge into for seeking inspiration (like Sicily for Plato, Swiss mountains for Nietzsche, Black Forrest for Heidegger, Norwegian countryside for Wittgenstein), but likewise to other cultural symbols and metaphors like Thales' celestial studies that caused his death, Kant's clockwork-regular walks, Spinoza's lens grinding. But the question is how do the city dwellers want to encounter philosophers? Is it through public talks, debates, public events, or something else? Such questions, and many more similar ones, may have lead to some recent developments that do not tell much to a professional philosopher at a first glance, but may appealingly address the general public according to its interests. A book series titled *Popular culture and philosophy* of the *Open Court Publishing Company* in Chicago [4] can be considered an attractive proposal of urban pop culture and it is able, at the same time, to generate immensely relevant philosophical discussions on subjects like *Seinfeld and Philosophy*, *The Matrix and Philosophy*, *Baseball and philosophy*, *Hip Hop and Philosophy*, *Harley-Davidson and Philosophy*, *iPod and Philosophy* and so on. Such an initiative can be considered explosive, and there are at least 75 such titles on the editor's website. Philosophy proposals like these are important in the context of the new expectancies of the general public regarding academic subjects. What is important about this series is the fact that it recognizes trivial social phenomena as culturally relevant and able to offer a platform for independent new texts, debates, and interpretations. It legitimately offers philosophers fresh perspectives on social issues. So we do not necessarily mean that Aristotle or Spinoza should have a Facebook account (still they do, actually), but that the texts (either historical or rewritten) of Aristotle or Spinoza should be explored as they have direct consequences or bring justifications into intellectual behavior and mental life of average human subjects.

The workshop had multiple goals. The main objective was to identify academics from Romania and abroad interested in building a research group in the Historiography of Philosophy, which is a less popular Philosophical branch, still receiving more and more attention in international scholarly research. To achieve this, we invited significant scholars like Gereby Gyorgy from CEU Budapest, Dan Stone from Royal Holloway University of London, Alexander Kremer, from the University of Szeged, Mihai and Daniela Maci, Florin Lobont, Alexandru Petrescu, Robert Lazu and other Romanian academics to be members of the project. The program included presentations and debates on the Historiography of Philosophy. Besides, several scholars from Romania and abroad (Selusi Ambrogio from Urbino, Italy, Youngmin Kim from Seoul, Corea, Teodor Negru from Iasi, Dorin Stefanescu from the University of Targu Mures, Oana Matei from Arad, Maftei Stefan Sebastian from Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Cristian Iftode from Bucharest University) stated their intention to participate

as non-financed speakers which is a good indicator that the subject of the workshop and the scholars that have been listed as financed members were of interest.

A second objective was to design relevant directions of research for the Historiography of Philosophy itself, and in connection with other disciplines that use common conceptual frames. We imagined four directions for our explorations which have been positively received and covered by all speakers:

a) Concepts, methods, practices in Philosophical Historiography - as theoretical background and source of arguments for the entire research; participants offered conceptual debates and study cases for their own research in the History of Philosophy, even comparative developments. This panel was covered by the Key note speeches of Gyorgy Gereby, Claudiu Mesaros and by the presentations by Mihai Maci, Alexandru Petrescu, and Ioan Bus. Non funded participants also added to this panel: Youngmin Kim, Teodor Negru, Dorin Stefanescu.

b) Traditions, inheritance, influence, sources, schools - debates on traditional instruments for Philosophical Historiography, attempts to re-contextualize and critical analysis. Alexander Kremer offered a memorable keynote speech on this panel and he was joined by the speakers Janos Toth, Florin Lobont, Iasmina Petrovici, and Teodora Artimon. Extra (non funded) participants were: Selusi Ambrogio, Oana Matei, Maftai Stefan Sebastian, Cristian Iftode, and Raluca Bercea. Some of the results from this panel state that, first, for classical philosophy (Medieval and Ancient), it is still a good principle that historiographical interpretations, especially of Presocratic philosophers, presuppose a set of hermeneutical premises that – first of all – must be carefully chosen. Without such a meta-historical approach all the given interpretation will work with hidden presuppositions which in many cases are not adequate to their object. Nevertheless, certain time-honoured terms of historiography of philosophy should be deconstructed and new approaches for the study of philosophies and theologies must be suggested. Still, some medieval authors must be targeted with critical assessment on hagiobiographical literature as a possible source for reconstructing their intellectual history.

Different philosophers who belong to different philosophical movements can do in some sense the same regarding the history of philosophy. Despite their differences, it may be proved, on one hand, that some part of their philosophies is *primus inter pares*; on the other hand, they both are relativists in some sense, and claim that we can have only narratives about the history of philosophy. Philosophical texts are mental most of the times, because they have counter-parts consisting of images present in authors' and audiences' minds and the contemporary perspective relies on the global mediascape and its relation with the signification of the world in pragmatist terms. Nevertheless, consistency is a relevant criterion for each trend in the historiography of philosophy. In the case of the analytical history of philosophy the consistency is defined by contemporary standards and in the contextual approach consistency is defined by standards that are present in the studied text, in the text corpus of the author, in the larger context of the epoch to which the author belongs. Any philosophical historiography depends on the meta-theoretical presuppositions of the historian. Thus, his/her interpretation will become a "historiography of legitimation" which will only reflect the hidden "agenda" of the interpreter.

The technologically critical thoughts of 20th century literature (i.e. dystopic works) and philosophy (Spengler, Walter Benjamin, the Frankfurt School, Heidegger) give a key to understanding the civilizational crisis symptoms of the 21st century. Realism is in this context relevant to the public understanding of reality and our cognitive relation to the perception of philosophy. In Romanian philosophical historiography a critical recuperation is needed in order to evaluate the dogmatic influence on it, as there is no continuity in Romanian Philosophical Historiography at all, which is a fact resulting from case studies on Aristotelian literature.

c) Cultural and social image of philosophy. Representations of philosophers and philosophy - an extension towards comparative and imagological studies, based on both diachronic models (such as *Models of the History of Philosophy: From the Cartesian Age to Brucker*, by Giovanni Santinello) [5] [6] and synchronicity or even communicational views. An interesting argument in this perspective is the frequent and attractive contemporary discussion of Philosophy as popular discourse, critical to elites and academics: philosophy as pop art, urban culture (for instance the book of D. E. Wittkower, *Facebook and Philosophy* [7], part of a well regarded series called Popular culture and philosophy from the *Open Court Publishing Company* in Chicago). Appealing as it was, this panel attracted spectacular presentations. Robert Lazu offered a highly qualitative scholarly key note and he was followed by the speakers: Vincenzo Romania, Daniela Maci, and Ioan Drehe.

d) Philosophy within local and regional context - endeavours objectives connected to exploring new directions, virgin in philosophical historiography in Romania, the relation between methods and concepts of universal Philosophical Historiography and local/regional cultural history. On such ground we aimed to talk about strategies for introducing the Romanian public, both specialized and non-specialized, to philosophical authors that are still unknown such as Gerardus of Cenad as a start, but on long term, Pelbartus Ladislaus of Temeschwar and Ignatius Batthyani as well. Two key note presentations were given for this panel: Cristian Gaspar and Elod Nemerkenyi, and then papers by Claudiu Mesaros, Dorel Micle, and Constantin Rupa.

The third objective was to explore the possibility to open Philosophical Historiography research towards comparative and interdisciplinary approach with important stakes within the History of Ideas and Imagology, thus aiming at building conceptual links with researchers involved in neighbouring directions: classicists, Historians of ideas, Imagology experts, and Historians. Researchers were present from different academic areas: Ancient and Medieval Philosophy, Contemporary Philosophy, Political Philosophy, Classical Philology, Literature, Archaeology, Law. This is obviously an argument that the workshop subjects have been positively received and largely endorsed by the very fact of the participants' diverse backgrounds. The forming of a research Centre within the West University of Timisoara has also been designed.

Another objective was to establish a set of common purposes between a group of experts in order to build a team for translating and editing a Romanian edition of Gerardus of Cenad's *Deliberatio supra hymnum trium puerorum ad Isingrimum liberalem* [8]. The scarcity of verifiable sources and especially the total lack of an interpretative tradition make the *Deliberatio* case very difficult to interpret on solid arguments as philosophical, but, still, the specifics of medieval texts and mainly the fact that 19th Century edition of Batthyany delivers a philosophical interpretative direction makes the task attainable. St. Gerard is a rather unlikely intellectual presence in eleventh-century Central-Eastern Europe, on the margin of Latin Christendom but the two *Vitae* contain valuable information which could be used, with all the necessary precautions, for contextualizing his activity in historical and intellectual context of the early eleventh century. A necessary condition for this is the elaboration of a new critical edition of the relevant hagiobiographic material. Still, *Deliberatio* will be translated into Romanian, and the text will be introduced under the philosophical account due to the explicit interpretation made by Batthyany and to important philosophical considerations explicitly present in the text. I have invited the most relevant scholars on the subject (Elod Nemerkenyi, Cristian Gaspar, Gereby Gyorgy, Dorel Micle) and they accepted from the very beginning to become members of the project. Then I introduced the participants to my project of building a research group designed to translate and edit into Romanian the *Deliberatio* of Gerardus of Cenad; the project triggered intense debates and interest and, as consequence, we already started the documentation for building a database. Elod Nemerkenyi and Cristian Gaspar joined the project with introductory studies and translation reviews, and there is another scholar as well that could not participate at the workshop but has been named by the team for the draft translation of the text into Romanian (Marius Ivascu from the West University of Timisoara).

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